

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This chapter reports and summarizes the main findings about how collaborative blogging contributed to the communicative skills in writing of Thai university EFL students and their attitudes towards using collaborative blogging. In addition to this, the pedagogical implications and limitations of the study are also discussed and finally suggestions are given for future research and improvement.

5.1 Summary of the Results

The summary of the results of the study, in response to the research questions addressed in this study, are presented below.

Research Question I

The first research question was, "In what way does using collaborative blogging contribute to the communicative skills in writing of Thai EFL university students?"

The results showed the participants overall displayed low degrees of communicative skills in writing: creativity, critical thinking, voice, and comments (26%-32%). Even though, the participants displayed low scores, the process of commenting on the blogs made the participants get to know each other and their blog writing styles outside of the classroom. These writing styles gave the participants ideas on what to write and how to write in their own blogs. Using creativity and humor, some participants managed to keep a conversation going on the blogs. The response to this creativity and humor motivated them to continue writing on the blog. The participants did not seem to be shy about voicing their opinion on the blogs. They communicated with others, by putting questions across to them in the form of a blog post or comments. The participants were seen as communicating on Blogger from time to time during the course of the study.

Research Question II

The second research question was, “What are the student’s attitudes towards collaborative blogging?”

Most of the participants had a positive attitude towards blogging and found the collaborative blogging project to be enjoyable. They reported that reading others’ blogs and also the feedback from others on their own blogs helped in writing the blog assignments better and improved their writing skills. It also improved their relationship with other participants and motivated them to write more. One-fourth of the participants felt that the collaborative blogging project helped improve their communicative skills in writing. With regards to the usability of Blogger, half of the participants felt that Blogger was a difficult software to use. In spite of this, overall, the process of blogging and commenting was perceived as a fun experience by the participants.

5.2 Discussion

The results of the current study are discussed in this section and reported in two parts. The first part addressed EFL students’ communicative skills in writing and the second part reported EFL students’ attitudes toward collaborative blogging.

Based on the results in the area of critical thinking, the participants displayed a certain degree of critical thinking, depending upon their topics of their interest and possibly their background knowledge and experiences on that topic. The topics such as money and Valentine’s Day seemed to bring about more interest and more discussion was generated from these blog assignments. This showed that if the participants were given topics that related their own lives, they felt motivated to carry on communicating through blogs.

Regarding the display of participants’ voice in their blog assignments, there was a varying degree in the participants’ contribution, and a reason for this might have been anxiety while writing on the blogs. According to Fernsten (2008) students should not be anxious while writing and should feel comfortable and motivated to write. Some students might have a natural flair for reading and writing well, which might have led to some participants having the confidence to bring about their inner voice in the blogs.

The comments that were generated from the participants in the blog assignments were varied depending upon the topic, and also upon how much attention was brought to the blogs posts. There were occasional instances when one of the participants did not think of the comments given by another participant as positive, and was a little offended. However, the comments itself were not offensive, and the participant had the nature of adding a lot of humor and satire to their comments. Generally, comments that had humor in them generated more discussion. A possible reason for the participants’ general positive contribution might have been because the participants were not being checked for accuracy in their writing, and the focus was fluency. According to Torwong (2003), there is a need for teachers in Thailand to focus on fluency, to allow the students to write freely and feeling less anxious.

Overall, it was found that writing the blog assignments in their own time encouraged the participants to feel less anxious and contribute to the study. According

to Brooks and colleagues (2004), it is the nature and convenience of blogs might that encourages participants to write more with ease.

5.2.2 EFL Students' Attitudes towards Collaborative Blogging

The result of the participants' attitudes towards collaborative blogging, as analyzed from the questionnaires and interviews, is discussed below. With regards to the usefulness of writing the blog assignments and commenting on other's blogs, most participants felt that it helped them to communicate with other participants more than before and improved their relationship outside of class. The study also showed that the participants showed a positive attitude to reading others' blogs. It helped them to get ideas for writing their own blogs and also to learn the style of commenting on other's blogs. According to the studies done by Kavaliauskiene et.al. (2006, 2006b, 2007) and Wu (2005), students improve their language skills and become more aware of using the language after reading and commenting on others' blogs. The results revealed that the participants were open to receiving comments from others. Most of the participants found it enjoyable with the exception of one participant who was a little offended by the satirical comments that one other participant made on their blog.

With regards to problems in blogging, some participants mentioned that they did not have access to computers and a good internet connection outside the university campus and were not able to complete the blog assignments on time. In addition they encountered difficulties in using Blogger as it was not as user friendly and familiar to them, compared to social networking sites like Facebook which was used for frequent communication. Regarding the problems of user interface and comments disappearing from time to time, a similar problem was found in a study by Lee (1998) in which the participants wrote that they needed more time to learn and get accustomed to new software. In the present study the participants were given explanation on how to use Blogger by the course teacher demonstrating it in class, in the first week, after which the participants were told to start writing the blog assignments from the second week. A solution to this problem could be by giving more time to the participants in the training session, and giving them sufficient time to encounter bugs and other problems which could be addressed in class.

Another issue that this study wished to address was Thai students not being able to take charge of their own learning. A way to foster learner autonomy in this study was by giving a chance to the participants to choose their own topics for the blog assignments after the initial blog assignment which was decided by the researcher. Only one participant took the lead in suggesting topics to the others. Some participants agreed to the topics and there was one participant who had some disagreement regarding the suggestions, which was communicated through messages between the course teacher and the participants on Facebook. Eventually the participants found the process to be challenging and let the one participant suggest all the topics. In the interviews many participants mentioned that the teacher should suggest the topics and it was not possible for all the participants to agree with and come to a decision about one topic for each blog assignment. The participants when asked, if they had suggested any topic that they would like to write about, said that they just agreed with any topic and this way it would be easier. A possible reason for this might be the participants not getting enough opportunities to be able to think for themselves and be given the chance to take charge of their learning.

5.3 Pedagogical Implications

Blogs have become quite popular among university students and adults alike in the past few years. Recently many blogging websites have come up such as Tumblr, Xanga and Twitter. Websites such as Twitter can be linked to other websites and social networking sites such as Facebook. The blogging websites allow users to communicate with another in a collaborative manner and sites like Tumblr have also added features similar to Facebook such as 'Liking' posts on blogs and allowing these posts to be reposted on one's own blog site. Posts from other websites such as Twitter and RSS feeds can also be imported into Tumblr. All these features provide a platform for collaboration, and educators could take advantage of this communicative nature of blogs and incorporate them into their own classrooms. Learners can share their experiences on their blogs with teachers as well as other students, providing opportunities for teachers to keep communicating with their students outside the classroom. With the blogging websites adding new features with time, and providing option for posting photos and videos, this could be used to give a more personal touch to the communication.

The results provided by the current study give a further insight into providing some pedagogical implications for the future. The participants generally welcomed the collaborative nature of blogging and stated that it helped them to get to know more about their friends and learn from others' experiences. This could then be used as an initiative for the teachers to incorporate blogs in their classrooms as well as outside of class, and allow themselves to also communicate with their students. Secondly, the results of the written products showed that the participants provided more output when writing about topics that were interesting to them and ones they could relate to their own lives. These assignments generated more discussion and comments from their friends. Taking this into regards, teachers can carefully assign topics that the students might be familiar with, for writing assignments. According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) and Graves (2000), learners should be given activities that are more personalized and ones that they can relate to. This is also a step in helping learners become autonomous. Once the students start taking interest in the students when necessary.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

The limitations posed in the present study are presented as follows. Firstly, the study was carried out with fourth-year English major students who were all Thai. The results might have been different if the study was carried out in a different environment, which included non-Thai participants as well. Secondly, the course in which the study was carried out was already a writing course, where the emphasis was essay writing. There could have been different results if the study was carried out in other courses such as speaking, reading or other general English courses.

Thirdly, the students were English major university students and their level of English might be higher than the non-English major students studying English. In addition, the students were graded for their blog assignments. This was possibly the biggest limitation because the grade was an incentive for the students to write the assignments. The results could have been different if the students had not been scored blogging project.

The results of the study might vary if random sampling of participants had been done instead. The time frame for this study was one semester and it was not possible to conduct a longitudinal study to assess the students' progress on the blogs.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

This section reports the recommendations for future studies, based on the findings of the current study. Firstly, the results of the current study were obtained on carrying it out only with Thai students. The findings thus cannot be generalized for EFL students, who might consist of non- Thais too. The study could be replicated with other EFL students, both Thai and non-Thai. Secondly, it was seen that the scores given to the participants for the blog assignments motivated them to write in their blogs. The current study could be replicated in the future without assigning any scores for the blog assignments and the written output of the participants could then be observed.

Lastly, this study was carried out to observe how collaborative blogging contributed to the communicative writing skills of the students taking a writing course. With blogging sites being updated all the time and with all the new features being added to the sites, it would be interesting to see the results when the blogs are extended to other course and other classrooms, such as in conversation classes, reading classes as well as in other subjects such as Business English, History, Psychology to name a few.

5.6 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter discussed the major findings of the present study which were the ways in which collaborative blogging contributed to the communicative skills in writing of Thai EFL students and also their attitude towards collaborative blogging. The participants generally communicated well through blogs, outside classroom hours, and found the process of commenting on each other's blogs to be enjoyable. The display of creativity, critical thinking and inner voice in the blog posts and comments, enhance the communication among the participants. The participants' attitude toward the blogging experience was generally positive, and the results from the questionnaires and interviews provided further insight into how the study could be improved in the future. The pedagogical implications, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research were also discussed. The pedagogical implications were to provide in depth training and orientation before starting to blog with EFL students, in order to address any technical issued that came up. Another implication was to let learners decide topics for themselves for blogging, and in the process of negotiation with each other, to try and make them autonomous learners. By addressing the biggest limitation in this study, which was giving scores for the blog assignment, an interesting observation in the future could be if the participants are still motivated to write, without scores. The study could also be incorporated into other EFL classrooms such as Conversation, Reading and Business English courses and could possibly be conducted with other EFL students who would comprise of both Thai and non-Thai students.